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Review of Eric L. Santner, *Friedrich Hölderlin: Narrative Vigilance and the Poetic Imagination*.

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SANTNER, ERIC L. *Friedrich Hölderlin: Narrative Vigilance and the Poetic Imagination*. New Brunswick, London: Rutgers University Press, 1986. 184 pp. \$26.00.

Eric Santner's study, "intended both as a 'revisionist' reading of Hölderlin's later poetry and an introduction to a larger study of issues concerning narrative theory" (p. ix), interprets formal aspects of the later poems—what has traditionally been called their *harte Fügung*—in terms of narrative parataxis, i.e. a breakdown in the Idealist "narrative of redemption." Santner begins with a theoretical discussion of narrative drawn chiefly from Hayden White and Roland Barthes (especially from *Camera Lucida*). Opposing "narrative vigilance," that potentially pathological compulsion to comprehend particulars within a hypotactic, overarching narrative structure, is a strategy of parataxis whereby narrative vigilance is released as the poet focuses on concrete particulars. Using this theoretical approach, Santner interprets Hölderlin "against the grain" of a more traditional criticism which relates the poet to the context of German Idealism (p. 26).

Santner proceeds by setting forth the narrative of the "vigilant" Hölderlin: the familiar upward spiraling plot that moves from original unity, to a condition of disintegration, fragmentation, and alienation, to a recovery of unity on a higher level. Santner finds this narrative structure in a number of contexts. It serves as the outline of a universal history (especially in the hymns invoking the image of the *Fest*) and of individual development (Hyperion's "eccentric path"); it is also reflected in his poetic theory (unity achieved through the modulation of tones).

Santner detects in Hölderlin's preoccupation with this narrative an anxiety "that objects . . . once separated by clear borderlines will fall into a kind of absolute isolation and muteness" (p. 49). This anxiety becomes critical for the poet as he increasingly is confronted with "that which proves to be intractable vis-à-vis any narrative redemption" (p. 54). This threat is felt acutely in "Hälfte des Lebens," where the harmonious images of the first strophe are replaced with the "autotelic" "side-by-sideness" of mute, cold walls and clanking weather vanes in the second, this paralleled by progressively paratactic syntax. However, Santner discovers another response to irreconcilable particulars, which he believes is signaled by the poet's turn to "Nüchternheit," sobriety, after the turn of the century.

The beginnings of this change are found in the transition between the first and third versions of "Der Einzige": a dialectical relationship between Dionysos and Christ that attempts to fit both deities into a synthetic historical scheme becomes one stressing juxtaposition or "side-by-sideness." Stylistic alterations reflect the same tendency: the breakup of the line through the proliferation of commas, the elimination of subordination by introducing lists, the interruption of rhythmic flow with heavy accents. Narrative vigilance is not abandoned, but it is eroded by countervailing paratactic tendencies. The same holds for "Patmos." Here specific, historical images tend to pile up, shard-like, in the strophe, making narrative containment increasingly difficult. This constitutes a "middle ground . . . between the fully autotelic image and the image as a structural component of a narrative" (p. 115).

The final stage, "beyond narrative vigilance," is reached as the poet "begins to discover the pleasures of 'die Tageszeichen'" ("Mnemosyne," StA 2,1:197). He finds comfort in the common things surrounding him, "the possibility of a life in nonsacred,

mundane space and time" (p. 119). Narrative vigilance is released and the poem is set free to drift, daydreamlike, according to a logic of association that Santner is willing to call, despite the anachronism, a stream of consciousness (p. 123). "Andenken" and the hymnic fragment "Vom Abgrund nemlich . . ." are interpreted in this light: in both cases the poet relaxes narrative and diction and allows his memories of Bordeaux to emerge and play freely in the poem.

The observations Santner makes in his study are in part well-founded. The question remains, however, if they have been configured correctly in the narrative Santner himself wishes to tell, a narrative not just of a development in Hölderlin's writing, but also, implicitly, of Hölderlin coming to approximate a peculiarly post-modern attitude towards knowledge and language. The closer Santner believes Hölderlin comes to a paratactic, deictic, photographic, etc., style, the more anachronistic his interpretations become. Symptomatic is his discussion of "Andenken." Instead of accounting for the highly reflected structure of the poem—an exemplary embodiment of Hölderlin's theory of the modulation of tones—he prefers to glide along the poem's surface, finding sensuous images, rich vowel clusters, additively employed *aber*'s, which together constitute no more than a *mémoire involontaire* (pp. 133 f.). Far more perceptive and historically responsible is Jochen Schmidt's interpretation, which Santner dismisses as "Hegelianizing" (p. 128). Thus Santner's study itself seems to fall prey to its own kind of narrative vigilance, that of the postmodern determined to inscribe his own odyssey towards fragmentation upon the Western intellectual tradition. It would appear, however, that the—historical—concreteness of Hölderlin's poetry resists being "constellated" in a narrative of this sort.

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